

Litchfield Board of Education  
Special Meeting Minutes  
May 11, 2023

1. Call to Order The Litchfield Board of Education meeting held at Litchfield High School and via teleconference was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Mr. Terzian.

Members present: Mr. Terzian, BOE Chair, Mr. Clock, Vice Chair, Mr. Malo, Secretary, Mr. Shuhi, Mr. Breslin, Ms. Reardon, Mr. Morosani, and Ms. Murphy. Also present: Mr. Leone, Superintendent, Dr. Pascento, Principal Litchfield High School, Ben Storrs, Dean of Students Litchfield, Mr. Valerio, Principal Litchfield Intermediate School, Ms. Deltano, Principal Litchfield Center School, Ms. Haggard, Director of Pupil Services, Mrs. Smith, K-12 Humanities Coordinator, and Mrs. Hodges, LPS & RSD6 District Liaison.

2. Pledge of Allegiance Mr. Terzian invited everyone to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Leone requested the Board hold a moment of silence in honor of Joyce Briggs who recently passed away. Mrs. Briggs was a Board of Education member from 1975 to 1987 in Litchfield as well as the Board of Education Chair from 1983 to 1987.

The Board of Education and meeting attendees held a moment of silence.

3. Approval of Minutes

- a. Review the minutes of the regular meeting of April 6, 2023

Mr. Clock made a motion to approve the regular meeting minutes of April 6, 2023. Mr. Malo seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously.

4. Public Comment

Before calling those who signed up for public comment to the podium, Mr. Terzian read aloud the names of those who have submitted letters to the Board of Education. They were Shannon Dyke, Marnie Smith, Brooke Celentano, Kalynn Gangel, Ashley Labonte, Amy Tibius, Malina Clinton, Kim Roe, Nadine Stevenson, Jennifer Johnson, Andy Parker, Raymond Zetti, Daniel Chase, Barbara Ellis and Dave Bernard, Melanie O'Leary, Jill Sage. Mr. Leone received another letter today (May 11, 2023) signed by Polly and Gary Kertix, Dr. Maggie Noonan, Dr. Sarah Sahl, and Frances Harding.

Mr. Terzian then began calling speakers to the podium.

*Matt Moskowitz* is asking the board to make a decision to move forward with arming the current school security officer or someone else. He shared the current security officer is certified, has a Connecticut pistol permit has been trained and certified to deal with proper weapons carry. Mr. Moskowitz is confident the current security officer is the person for the job and is fit to carry a firearm within school system.

He commented if the district doesn't arm the school security officer and incidences continue we will need to be reactive and he would rather be proactive. Mr. Moskowitz commented there are parents who support doing this now, between incidences. He then spoke that he was unsure what the majority opinion is but if there were concerns he would be happy to answer questions as a resource and will respect the decision of the Board regardless of the outcome. Mr. Moskowitz closed by saying if the district pays someone for school protection, safety and security in the school, they should be given the tools to do the job.

*Maebel Haynes* is a junior at Litchfield High School and spoke in opposition of having a school security officer in this building. Ms. Haynes spent her middle school years in Hartford where we had three SROs that were all members of the Hartford police. She said her experiences with them were mostly positive however looking at the raw data, both the National Education Association (NEA), and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) have called for a higher focus of in school resources before SROs are activated.

Ms. Haynes spoke to research conducted by the ACLU and the Center for Public Integrity. The Brookings Institute, UConn Center for Education Policy Analysis, and the United States Congressional Research Service, have all come out and said that there's been no productive benefit of having SROs in school. The major reason that SROs have been implemented, has been to reduce the likelihood of school shootings. There has been zero data to support that. In fact, one research found that in 197 instances of gun, violence in schools, only three of them were successfully stopped by SROs and all instances had an SROs active in the building.

Ms. Haynes cited another recent study found that amongst all school, shootings between 1999 and 2018 that had SROs had injuries and deaths in numbers that were two and a half times higher than those that did not.

Ms. Haynes stated SROs been found to contribute to the criminalization of youth, and a conducted survey found that 77% of SROs have arrested kids. SROs have been proven to refer students of color and Latinx students along with students with disabilities at significantly higher rates and for much more minor offenses than non-disabled, white kids to the police, SROs have also been linked to a higher rate of suspensions and expulsions, no matter the school district or school type.

SROs have also been linked to putting students at an increased risk of falling into the school to prison pipeline. Ms. Haynes said she has conversed with a lot of her friends about this issue and they all feel the same way. She can tell the Board, for a fact, that even most students who aren't here at this meeting or have not submit letters; there's an active concern among students for this issue and having guns in schools.

Ms. Haynes closed by saying she is opposed to having a school security officer and thanked the Board.

Erika Haynes commented in support of the previous speaker (*Maebel Haynes*) and “she couldn’t say it any better.” She went onto say she works across the state in education districts. From her on the ground experiences and conversations with students, teachers, and parents in those districts; the cons outweigh the pros. The cons don't outweigh the pros by a little, but significantly. Part of it is the emotional burden of kids who have encounters that go wrong. As a parent of two students, one in the middle school, one in the high school, she supports her daughter in her testimony, however they came to their testimonies separately. Ms. Haynes closed by saying she is here as a parent to say she opposes this vehemently and thanked the Board.

*Kara Cruoglio* is a parent of a sixth grade student opened by thanking the Board for everything they do for the town, school district and students. She then provided statistics on the number of students between one and seventeen who are shot every year with deaths and injuries by homicide, suicide and accidents. She spoke to studies that when first conducted in the late 1980s and 90s confirmed access and proximity to firearms is associated with an increased risk of firearm related, death and injury. Studies estimate that adolescents living in a home with a firearm are at four times higher risk of dying by suicide than those living in a home without a firearm. Ms. Cruoglio spoke to statistics relating to accidental

deaths, domestic violence, and unintentional firearm deaths and the consequences they have on victims, families, and communities, both physical and psychological.

Ms. Cruoglio also provided information from the American Academy of Pediatrics that the most effective way to prevent unintentional gun injuries, suicide, and a death to children is to remove guns from homes and communities. If the study is accurate, why bring guns into schools. She went onto say she did her own research when first learning the Board was considering arming school resource officers to identify the pros and cons and couldn't find one that indicated arming SRO's keep schools safer. She found three studies; the University of Albany Hamline University, the Rand Corporation, Hamline University, all found zero correlation between the presence of armed officers in schools and deterring violence.

Ms. Cruoglio spoke about investing in mental and emotional health of our children and to use school funds to hire counselors and social workers that will help build, emotional resilience, and positive mental and behavioral development in students.

Ms. Cruoglio closed by saying she is asking the Board to vote no to arming school resource officers. If the Board chooses to vote yes, she is asking it consider putting together a committee to study, discuss the effectiveness and potential consequences before spending taxpayer dollars to put guns in our schools. She thanked the Board.

*Harmony Tanguay* commented she has an elementary school student and one in the Intermediate School and said the topic of arming SRO's is an emotional one because we're talking about how to decrease the chances of our kids being murdered at school. Ms. Tanguay is asking the decision to arm SRO's not be made emotionally but made based on available data and data does not support this. If more guns, made us safer, the US would be the safest country in the world right now. Ms. Tanguay shared statistics that some have been mentioned but is doing so to reinforce them. One of the statistics cited is in 197 instances of gun violence at US schools; SRO's intervene successfully in only three instances. One study found that among all schools, that experienced a school shooting between 1999 and 2018, the number of injuries and deaths was actually about 2.5 times higher in schools that had an SRO. Research suggests that many school shooters are actively suicidal intending to die in the act so an armed officer may actually be an incentive rather than a deterrent. Another study of armed SROs and schools found nearly a hundred reported incidents of mishandled guns at schools in the last five years, including unintentional, discharge of a weapon, students grabbing an officers gun out of the holster, and SRO's leaving weapons unattended in restrooms.

Ms. Tanguay also commented on an interesting study called Averted School Violence.org, which is data compiled by the National Institute of Policing and instances where school violence had been averted. The number one factor that prevented violent acts was students reporting something that they had seen or heard. That was the most effective way to prevent school violence.

Ms. Tanguay supports what Ms. Cruoglio said and to arm our children with knowledge instead of putting armed officers in our schools. She also urges the Board to look at other variables when considering this including potential liability, the cost of lawsuits and insurance payouts, and look at the data on the social emotional impact of students who have armed SRO's present in their schools. This decision should not be made lightly or quickly, and she urges the Board to at the very least, convene a study group to look at all available data, and perform a detailed cost benefit analysis before voting on this topic. And then the Board should share this process and the gathered data transparently with our community.

Ms. Tanguay closed by saying it may feel counterintuitive, but please use your heads and not your hearts on this one and thanked the Board.

*Nadene McDemott Stevenson* said she sent a letter to each Board of Education member and to the Superintendent and she is going to read her letter out loud and wished the Board would share all letters from her colleagues. Ms. Stevenson feels strongly about having armed security. School safety should be at the forefront of our minds. She understands that this is a complex issue. She would like to express her strong desire to have trained qualified armed security across the school district as a key deterrent to any active violence. She is a parent, community member, and a teacher at Litchfield Center School, and she really hopes that her voice is heard this evening.

*Tom Butwell* commented his background is an operations manager for an elevator company and they deal with security at schools all the time. Mr. Butwell sees this issue as multifold. People enter schools in many ways; by an open back door, unlocked door, and if someone wants to get into a school they will find a way. His wife works at Center School, and he feels that there's not enough being done to protect them. If someone does come into a school with the intent to harm, there is a classroom right there. And if they enter with a weapon, there is a class right there and they are small kids. Mr. Butwell feels that you are asking them to be shields. Mr. Butwell doesn't think this is fair for security people either as they have nothing to fight against. He cited Newtown Schools, after all they went through have high security. He also cited the last mass school shooting where they had no security and the person doing harm knew they could just walk in. Mr. Butwell closed by saying this is a big consideration, and is glad the district is talking about it as it is important. He thanked the Board.

*Malina Clinton (online)* commented she also sent a letter to the Board and Superintendent, and she would be brief. She is in support of the current School Resource Officer at Center School and also wants to make a point that Region 6 has already voted to go ahead with this. Ms. Clinton feels with Region 6 security armed, and her school is not it could make her school be even more of a target. With the regionalization it doesn't make sense to her that one district is armed and the other doesn't. Ms. Clinton closed by commenting she said a lot more in her letter and is definitely in support of it. She thanked the Board.

*Kathryn Myers (online)* commented she has a child at the Intermediate School, and one at Center School. Ms. Myers grew up in the area, went to Litchfield High School and said she is in full support of arming the school officer. She commented on her perspective as an emergency room nurse and a paramedic and has seen the horrible end of what can happen and wouldn't want to wish any of those circumstances upon anybody. Ms. Myers feels we should be protecting our kids at all costs. While she understands others viewpoints, what she has seen of family members who have lost a child due to trauma and gun violence is beyond devastating. She expressed her concern about children being at risk if somebody was to come into the school system. Ms. Myers feels incredibly fortunate to live in this town but as with the first speaker said, in today's society, it's not really a matter of if we have to think of, it as a matter of when. Ms. Myers feels we should really do everything that we can to protect our kids and is thankful for having the opportunity to speak tonight.

*Nerice Gerena* commented she is opposed to arming the SRO at our schools. Ms. Gerena commented on hearing the term smoke and mirrors on a number of occasions on this call and arming an SRO is a perfect example of that because these shootings take place with AR-15 's, weapons of war and a pistol cannot stand up to that weapon. If someone wants to blow windows out at a school it is unlikely someone with a pistol could stop them. There are examples where good guys who were armed did not stop the violence.

## 5. Superintendent's Report

### a. 2022-2023 Finance Report

Mr. Leone commented there is no change in Revenue or Expenses and Contingency currently sits at \$231,359. Mr. Leone reminded the Board the district must finish the year with \$200k as it needs to return that amount to the town and he sees no budgetary concerns about meeting this need.

### b. Personnel Report

Mr. Leone reviewed the May Personnel Report that showed vacancies for a system administrator, district-wide, and an Educational Assistant for Litchfield Middle/High School.

### c. Enrollment Report

Mr. Leone reviewed the May Enrollment Report.

### d. Region 20 Update

For the Region 20 Update, Mr. Leone shared that district colors should be finalized over the weekend as voting closes on Sunday, May 14, 2023. The next work will be to work on names for the Middle and High School and mascot design.

### e. Other Items

For Other Items, Mr. Leone shared a timeline for phone installation at Litchfield Center School, Middle, and High School. He also spoke about America 250, a state proclamation from Governor Lamont celebrating the 250 Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. This proclamation has resulted in the formation of America 250 where there will be several activities happening in our area with district involvement. Mr. Leone closed this topic by wishing everyone a Happy Mother's Day.

## 6. Presentation

### a. Arethusa Farm – C. Leone

Mr. Leone gave a presentation on the Arethusa Farm project. Some highlights of the presentation included the purpose for creating the foundation for Arethusa Farm to ensure its legacy as a farm property and a stable and secure economic structure, to increase the physical space and enrollment of AgSci program, the ability to utilize products from the farm to supplement lunch programs, and envisioning future student work life and adult programs to name a few. And importantly, Mr. Leone spoke to how the facility will be sustained without any budget impact on the Region 20 communities. Mr. Leone closed by sharing this will be shared with the Region 6 Board of Education so all communities are on the same page.

**Mr. Clock made a motion to add Item 6b. Public Comment. Mr. Breslin seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously.**

### b. Public Comment

*Maura Keaney* commented she has a student in the middle and high school and wanted to speak about the consideration of arming school resource officers. Ms. Keaney commented while we are all here to focus on student safety that study after study have shown that armed school personnel doesn't make schools safer in the case of school shootings. She cited several studies that included a 2019 study by researchers at the University of Toledo and Ball State University reviewed, 18 years of US school security measures and found no evidence of reduced gun violence. A 2021 study conducted by the University of Albany and Rand examined data from US schools between 2014 and 2018 to evaluate the impact of school resources officers and no association between having an armed officer and deterrence of violence.

Ms. Keaney spoke with her oldest child about the topic, and as an even keeled child, he does not support it either and thinks it will make kids feel unsafe. She said studies suggest that not only would it make someone feel unsafe it could, in fact, be more unsafe because of split second decisions. Ms. Keaney thanked the Board for having the opportunity to speak and hopes they consider a delay in voting and for the Board to look further into the research and studies.

*Lynn Rice. Scozzafava (online)* commented she is speaking as a 29 year veteran of Litchfield Public Schools, one singular teacher speaking only on her own behalf who has had nearly 3,000 students pass through her classroom doors. Ms. Scozzafava makes her comments thinking of all students, current and future, colleagues and employees of the district and says that guns do not belong in school. Ms. Scozzafava spoke that there is no evidence that armed personnel prevents school shootings and cited the Annenberg Institute at Brown University, with the support of the US Department of Justice, the data bears out the SROs, whether armed or not do not prevent gun related incidents. She spoke to a correlation between SROs and increases in suspensions, expulsions, arrests, referrals, discipline, and chronic absences and urged the Board to consider all data when making this decision.

Ms. Scozzafava spoke to her personal thoughts and feelings as an educator post Columbine. She spoke to how she readies herself for work every day reminding herself of where to go, what to do, how to protect the students if needed, all while remembering her core role of educating her students in the subject matter she teaches.

Mr. Terzian respectfully interrupted Ms. Scozzafava and requested she wrap up her comments as she had surpassed the three-minute limit.

She continued commenting you may not understand how traumatic this can be, the thought of having armed personnel in your place of employment and doing so won't lessen her fears or stop her daily thoughts. Ms. Scozzafava questioned the training of an armed security officer, posed hypothetical situations like what if the weapon was left some where and it accidentally went off, or was accidentally used, or someone were to grab or overpower the person with the gun. What will our schools become if someone is armed there?

Ms. Scozzafava closed saying that guns are an instrument of destruction and do not belong in schools. She urges the Board to reject fear-based decision-making and to commit to shoring up security measures in every school.

*Sarah Carr (online)* spoke as a parent and a kindergarten teacher. Every day, as a teacher you go to work to do your job but in the back of your mind you wonder if you will have to hide in the bathroom with your students and wait for the police to let you out. She commented about reminding students during playtime when running around using finger guns and building Lego guns that guns do not belong in schools. Ms. Carr requested the Board delay to vote on this topic and do research and discuss this more before moving forward. She closed by sharing her child, a sophomore, does not want guns in school. She also thanked the Board.

## 7. New Business

### a. Approval of MOU with LEA – EdAdvance Mental Health Services

Mr. Leone explained the purpose of the MOU with the LEA and EdAdvance. Mr. Morosani questioned the expiration date through 2027, which is past the existence of LPS and extends into the Region 20 timeline. Mr. Leone explained the MOU would need to be renegotiated with the Region 20 Board of Education.

**Mr. Morosani made a motion to approve 7a. Approval of MOU with LEA – EdAdvance Mental Health Services. Ms. Reardon seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously.**

b. Approval of Non-Resident Students

Mr. Morosani made a motion to approve *7b. Approval of Non-Resident Students*. Ms. Reardon seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously.

c. Set Outside-of-District Tuition – 2023-2024

Ms. Reardon made a motion to approve *7c. Set Outside-of-District Tuition – 2023-2024*. Mr. Morosani seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously.

Mr. Leone commented before the Board moved on to Item 7d. (Discussion (and possible action) on School Security Job Description/Policy) he received a number a letters regarding this topic over the last week and wanted to clarify that arming an SRO or a school safety personnel and related job description is not a decision of the superintendent but it is policy and falls under the purview of the Board of Education.

Mr. Leone spoke about some of the safety measures/improvements that have taken place; double door buzzers to get into the school buildings, internal and external analog cameras. The district has made progress but even with all measures, nothing is perfect or can provide 100% safety. If the Board decided this evening to move forward with the policy and job description, this does not occur immediately. There are state guidelines, certification requirements, and annual qualifications for personnel, as well as changes to insurance coverage, and policy review for final read the following month to name a few. Again, this is a decision for the Board.

d. (Discussion (and possible action) on School Security Job Description/Policy

Mr. Terzian opened Item 7d. for discussion.

Mr. Clock shared that when this first came up, he was against it. He has since talked to a lot of people and a lot of teachers and with great reluctance he is in favor of having an armed security.

Ms. Reardon suggests that the Board do a study and spend more time on this topic as they would something like new curriculum. She went on to say it is important to make decisions based on data and would like more time to do a study on what is the most effective thing to do to keep the kids and the staff safe.

Mr. Breslin shared that he agrees with Ms. Reardon in that the Board should see more data before making a decision, though wondering if they can conduct a reasonable study in time for the start of the school year.

Mr. Shuhi was inquiring if there was any sense of where the Region 20 Board of Education is on this topic as there is a short window for the Litchfield's Board's decision to be effective or ineffective.

Mr. Leone commented that the Region 20 Board will discuss this in their Policy Committee meeting but he wouldn't speak on behalf of the Region 20 Board as he would not do so for the Litchfield Board.

Mr. Shuhi then continued saying things that have stuck out to him were that you are looking at the probability of something happening. If there is no firearm in the building, someone can't take it away or it can't accidentally be left in a bathroom. Mr. Shuhi questioned aloud what i the probability of somebody trying to come into this building and the need to have some capacity to protect our students.

Mr. Morosani wanted to add onto what Mr. Shuhi had said, the SROs are not only protecting students and staff but are also protecting themselves. The SROs, by virtue of their position will have a target on

their back. Mr. Morosani added the Board has not seen community response like this for time and this should be a full Board discussion, with review of all the data out there. The Board could hold a special meeting or retreat solely on this topic. He added Region 6 voted on this 8-0-1 and this will be a topic the Region 20 Board will discuss at some point.

Mr. Malo commented as an educator himself how difficult this topic is for him personally. While he agrees guns don't belong in schools. He struggles with what if something did happen and he voted 'no' to not arm the resource officer and that resource could have taken the shooter out and saved lives. If this were to occur he doesn't think he could live with himself. Having listened to the data shared this evening it is making him think maybe the Board should slow down because at this time he is going with his heart and can't get that other thought out of his mind.

Mr. Leone inquired from the Board, about what a timeline would look like (a Board data review). If the Board votes no, there is no further action. If the Board comes back at the end of June and requests there be armed security personnel for the start of the school year, that is an unrealistic time frame. Mr. Leone cited the number of weeks it took Mr. Robillard to acquire the proper insurance for this on the Region 6 side in addition to acquiring the personnel and certifications.

Mr. Clock asked if the Board voted to move forward is it realistic to have someone hired by September.

Mr. Leone responded that the Policy would still need to go back to the Board next month, there would need to be a job posting, negotiations with insurance. If the district were to get someone qualified, maybe. Mr. Leone added this decision has been pushed off already as the Board wanted to wait to see what Region 6 would do. Mr. Leone will do whatever the Board wishes him to do but respectfully requests you read your stuff quickly and come back with a decision.

Mr. Shuhi commented he was going to say something similar that Mr. Leone said. Mr. Shuhi added he has read the letters, looked at the articles and is prepared to vote tonight.

Ms. Murphy said when this first came on the agenda and started receiving emails from the teachers she did her own research as well as reach what was sent to the Board from the superintendent. Ms. Murphy said the data does not support that guns in school make schools safer but it is just the opposite. While she is a huge Second Amendment supporter, she is also a huge believer that guns do not belong in schools. She has done her own research and is prepared to vote tonight if the rest of the Board is also prepared to vote.

Ms. Reardon shared she understands the comments Mr. Malo made if something happened and she voted against this how could you live with yourself, but her thinking is what if there is something more effective out there other than the guns. Ms. Reardon has been doing her research and has read the studies as a result of feeling the extra pressure of the Region 6 decision. Ms. Reardon wants to make the right decision and does not want to rush things and wants to do what is best to make the kids as safe as possible. She added it sounds like other Board members have done the research too but as a Board let's take the two weeks or whatever timeline until the next meeting so the Board can all come together and figure out the best decision to spend the money to keep the kids safe.

Mr. Leone interjected he did not say rushing to vote. Mr. Leone clarified whatever the Board decides to do, that is up to the Board. However, don't promise constituents that something is going to be ready in September because the district can't deliver on that.



Ms. Reardon clarified that she felt like the Region 6 decision rushed the Board and not to imply that the Superintendent rushed the Board into a decision.

Mr. Morosani inquired if there could be parallel paths to approve the policy as presented to the Region 6 Board and at the same time hold a discussion with the Board on how to proceed. Also, with the Board understanding if it agrees to move forward there could be a delay in implementing this by the start of the school year.

Mr. Leone clarified the policy is not a Litchfield policy so you would have to move it forward as a Litchfield Policy and direct the district to develop a Litchfield Policy and outlined the timeline for approval of the policy and job description.

Mr. Clock made a motion to direct the Superintendent to create a Job Description for School Safety Personnel and a Policy for School Safety Personnel. Mr. Morosani seconded the motion.

Mr. Clock made a motion to call it to vote. Mr. Shuhi seconded the motion.

Ms. Reardon requested a discussion. Mr. Breslin commented what is the substantive harm of voting for this motion. Ms. Reardon is ready to move forward to voting on the motion but only if it is tied to having a meeting to discuss the data and research.

Mr. Terzian called for a vote. The Board voted in favor.

Mr. Terzian called for a vote on the motion to direct the Superintendent to create a Job Description for School Safety Personnel and a Policy for School Safety Personnel. The vote passes 5 yes, 3 no.

Discussion continued on the motion that was approved that the district bring forward a policy and job description to the June meeting to vote on.

Ms. Reardon asked if there is a need to have a motion to hold a Special Board meeting to discuss the data and research making the best decision to move forward to keep the students safe. Mr. Leone commented that you do not need a motion to hold a Special Board meeting. The meeting needs to be posted, you can have one topic on the agenda and Public Comment needs to be limited to the agenda topic.

The Board agreed to post a Special Board of Education Meeting on Thursday, May 25, 2023 at 7:30 p.m. with a single topic and Public Comments.

8. Old Business  
None

9. Committee Reports

Mr. Clock shared the Finance Committee met earlier in the evening and received a 2022-2023 Budget Update, an update on insurance, and a change in grant funds distribution for the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE).

10. Executive Session  
None

11. Adjournment There being no further business to come before this Board, Mr. Clock made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Malo seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Christine Escobar  
Secretary, pro-tem